



THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Veterans' Health

S P R I N G • 2 0 0 2

The gift
of giving:
Volunteer
at the VA

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OLYMPIC
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RELAY

Take your medicine—
safely, easily and effectively

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio



Care closer
to home

A partnership for the better

Spring always seems like a good time to try something new. This year, why not try volunteering? Opportunities abound, and one really great place to start is at your local VA medical center. Besides the obvious good you'll be doing for others, you'll reap a few rewards yourself. To learn about some special contributions from VA volunteers and to find out how you can help, turn to page 5.

Now is also the season for spring cleaning. Instead of tackling your closets, look to your medicine cabinet. It is important to store your medications properly and keep them up to date. Talk with your VA primary care provider about medication-safety steps you should take. The article on page 6 has more suggestions on managing medicines properly.

On page 7, you'll learn how we are making it easier for you to receive care closer to home. Our community-based outpatient clinics expand our reach and bring services where you need them.

Of course, *Veterans' Health* is another way we are helping you remain an informed member of your healthcare team. In this issue, you'll also read about new co-payment regulations, beneficiary travel and our Clinical Programs of Excellence.

Don't forget that you play an important part in your well-being. We are your partners in health and are here for you.



—Clyde Parkis, Network Director

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through the VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of the VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

COVER PHOTO: MARK ARLINGHAUS, PHOTOGRAPHER, MEDICAL MEDIA, CINCINNATI VA CAMPUS



I recently needed dentures and was referred to the Dayton VA dental lab. Dr. Pemberton was the dentist who did the work for me. I was very pleased with him and the staff for their concern and the fine job they did for me. I appreciate having a facility that tries in every way to provide help when needed. I appreciate and want to say thanks to all of you at the VA medical center.

—Elmer Gilbert, Navy veteran

An award of excellence

The best in healthcare—that is what VISN 10 strives for. And now, those efforts have been recognized with VA's highest award for excellence in healthcare. Many programs throughout the Network have been designated "Clinical Programs of Excellence." The award commends areas that provide quality care with a patient focus. The programs serve as models in the VA healthcare system. VISN 10 received awards in several areas:

Networkwide:

- Seriously mentally ill

Cleveland:

- Spinal cord injury
- Cardiac surgery
- Domiciliary care for homeless veterans

- Healthcare for

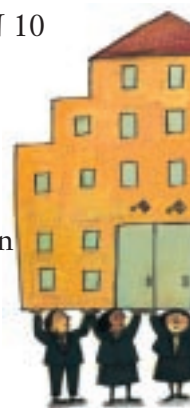
homeless veterans

- Substance abuse

- Geriatric evaluation and management

Cincinnati:

- Substance abuse



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Travel benefits from VA



Veterans may be eligible for payment or reimbursement of travel costs associated with receiving medical care. Travel reimbursement is limited to the nearest clinic or facility for medical care. Travel payments are subject to a deductible of \$3 for each one-way trip and an \$18-a-month maximum payment. Two exceptions to the deductible are travel for a compensation or pension exam and travel by special modes of transportation, such as ambulance or a specially equipped van, when medically indicated. Beneficiary travel payments may be made to veterans:

- with service-connected disabilities rated at 30 percent or more.
- traveling for treatment of a service-connected condition.
- receiving a VA pension.
- traveling for scheduled compensation or pension examinations.
- with income not exceeding the maximum VA pension rate.
- with a medical condition requiring a special mode of transportation, if the veteran is unable to defray the costs and travel is preauthorized. If the medical condition is a medical emergency, travel need not be preauthorized when a delay would be hazardous.

The VA Healthcare System of Ohio is required to regularly review its adherence to VA regulations regarding beneficiary travel. The results of this review may show that a limited number of veterans currently receiving assistance may not be eligible. Any veteran identified as ineligible will be notified and offered assistance from a social worker to investigate other transportation resources that may be available. Any local decisions regarding travel reimbursement may be appealed.

More detailed information on these regulations may be found at <http://www.va.gov/publ/direc/health/manual/010125.html> **VH**

Understanding your co-payments

Veterans who currently make co-payments for outpatient healthcare provided by VA will have lower bills and, in some cases, no bills at all under new rules. The new regulation sets up a three-tier co-payment system for outpatient care. The first tier is for preventive care visits and costs veterans nothing. Primary care outpatient visits comprise the second tier and require a co-payment of \$15. The last tier includes specialty outpatient care, like outpatient surgery, audiology and optometry, and costs \$50.

The co-payments don't apply to the treatment of medical problems recognized as service connected. For nonservice-connected conditions, the outpatient co-payments apply primarily to veterans enrolled in Priority Group 7.

Which veterans are required to make co-payments is determined by the means test. An annual income assessment, the test is used to determine in which priority group a veteran may fall.

The assessment includes income from all family members living within the veteran's household. Income includes Social Security, retirement, wages, dividends and other incomes for all household members. In addition, assets such as stocks, bonds and savings accounts are included. Assets do not include the personal residence or vehicles.

Income threshold levels are adjusted each year and are based on the number of dependents listed for each veteran. If a veteran exceeds the income threshold level, then the veteran is charged a co-payment for each visit or hospitalization.

Veterans who fall below the income threshold are not required to make a co-payment for their treatment; however, they may still be required to pay a medication co-payment. **VH**



A flame of endurance

December 17 was a rainy night in the Cincinnati area, but Ray Gleason didn't notice. It was his turn to be one of the 11,500 people chosen to carry the Olympic torch.

"It was just like the sky quit raining," Gleason says. "I wish everyone could experience it. If I had to describe it in one word—awesome."

His wife, Donna, had nominated the Vietnam veteran to be a torch bearer. She was there to support him on his fifth-of-a-mile leg, along with his son, Michael, and Michael's family. Even members of Gleason's own eighth grade class cheered him on.

Another one of Gleason's friends, Joe Cook, also watched him carry the torch. Cook and Gleason have supported each other for many years. Cook was with Gleason back on August 29, 1967, when both were serving in Vietnam. On that day, Gleason was shot in the head, causing paralysis to his right side. He couldn't speak for two years and underwent

extensive rehabilitation therapy at VA.

Now, Gleason uses a cane to get around. But he was determined not to use the cane while carrying the Olympic torch.

"I knew I might be slow," Gleason says. "I'm sure I threw off their whole schedule."

Carrying the torch, he says, was a way to represent the U.S. That task became even more meaningful after September 11, as everyone rallied together in unity.

Gleason has continually given back to his country, with his service as a Marine and now as a volunteer at VA. On Monday nights, he and other members of the Marine Corps League go to the Cincinnati VA medical center and pass out treats, like bananas, to patients. Every Fourth of July, Gleason also helps distribute gifts to veterans in the hospital.

He understands what the patients are going through. "I think I know a little of what it feels like to be in a hospital," Gleason says. "Volunteering is our way of saying thank you to the veterans." **VH**

The gift of giving: Volunteer at the VA

Since early times, the idea that “charity is its own reward” has underscored all giving. That is certainly true for the 5,000 people who volunteer at the VA Healthcare System of Ohio. From high school students to retired doctors, anyone can serve as a volunteer, and the ways in which they help are tailored to their interests and skills.

“We even have a lot of veterans who give their time back to the VA,” says Sharon Croteau, Voluntary Service, Dayton VA campus.

Croteau says the Dayton campus logged 120,000 volunteer hours last year. That is like having almost 57 additional full-time employees. And one Dayton volunteer has donated 11,000 hours himself throughout 54 years of service.

A place for everyone

Volunteers are in almost every part of the medical centers. Some help with administrative tasks like answering phones and filing; others simply lend a sympathetic ear to patients. One popular program has volunteers ferrying visitors from the parking lots to the hospital in golf carts.

What’s more, volunteers of the four-legged variety give through the pet therapy program. Dogs and cats visit with patients and share their unconditional love.

A wealth of benefits

For the veteran patients, the volunteers help make their stay brighter and let them know someone cares. The help also frees the medical center staff to focus better on patient care.

The volunteers reap rewards, as well. Studies at Cornell University and the University of Michigan suggest that volunteers live longer, healthier lives.

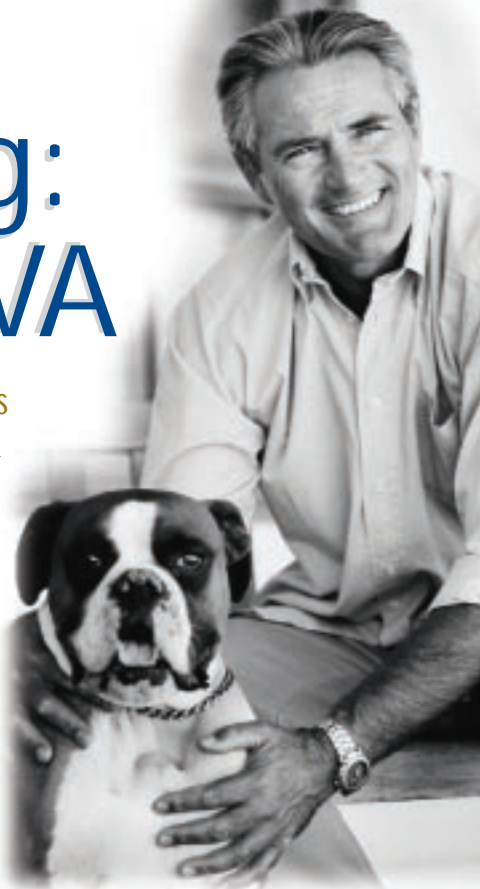
There are more immediate benefits, too. Volunteers are able to learn new skills and can set their own hours. Some come in once a month; others, every day. Plus, hours can count toward credits for free meals at the medical center.


“Volunteering lets people know that what they do means something,” Croteau says.

So what does it take to be a volunteer? “An enthusiasm for the patients and the people they see and a willingness to learn,” Croteau says. “Even if it is one patient who is helped, volunteers are making a difference in our veterans’ lives.”

For more information on how you can volunteer, call Voluntary Services at your local VA medical center:

Cincinnati.....513-475-6332
Chillicothe.....740-773-1141
Cleveland.....440-526-3030, ext. 6796
Dayton.....937-262-2162
Ft. Thomas.....859-572-6217





Take your medicine—safely, easily and effectively

It's practically a fact of life: Stick around long enough and at one point or another, your doctor will hand you a prescription and tell you you'll be taking it forever. Soon, you may find yourself juggling several prescriptions in addition to over-the-counter drugs.

What's more, changes in our body as we age make it important to follow doctors' orders to the letter: Because we accumulate more fatty tissue as we get older, fat-soluble drugs can build up to toxic levels. And because, over time, the liver and kidneys (our body's filtering system) become less efficient, medications tend to stay in our system longer, requiring special attention to dosage.

Follow these tips when taking medicine:

- Keep your doctor informed. Fill a brown bag with every medication (prescription and nonprescription) you're on and take it to your VA healthcare provider for review. While you're there, ask about dosages for nonprescription drugs, too; following package directions is not always the safest course.
- Create a medicine calendar. Enlist your doctor's help to make up a calendar detailing exactly what medication you should be taking and when. Ask him or her about the possibility of consolidating drug-

taking. For example, it may be safe and effective to take certain medicines at the same time rather than at staggered times throughout the day.

- Pay careful attention to side effects. Do certain medications make you drowsy, lightheaded or weak? Are you having difficulty sleeping? Speak to your doctor about any discomfort you may be experiencing. He or she may adjust your dosage or change your prescription. **VH**

Added medication safety at VA

VA is the first health system to use medication bar coding nationwide. Bar code medication administration ensures the right medication is given to the right patient at the right time. Handheld scanners compare bar codes on the medication with bar codes on the patient's wristband and with the provider's orders.

"It is a tool for nursing and pharmacy to work together to improve patient care," says Ginny Creasman, a pharmacist at the Cincinnati VA campus.

The system works so well that it was presented the Hammer Award from the National Partnership for Reinventing Government. The award recognizes achievements that make government work better and reduce costs.

"We're the model and are excelling in this process," Creasman says. "Other hospitals want to know what we're doing." **VH**

Medication do's and don'ts

- **Do** follow your doctor's orders precisely. There's a reason why your doctor may have told you to take your medication with food or after a meal.
- **Do** establish a pill-taking routine. Take them at the same time each day to ensure the effect in your body is constant.
- **Don't** stop taking a drug because you feel better. Antihypertensives, for example, control rather than cure high blood pressure and must be taken regularly.
- **Don't** automatically double up on a dose if you skipped one. Ask your doctor or pharmacist what you should do.

Care closer to *home*

Remember when receiving VA health-care meant traveling for miles to reach your nearest VA medical center?

Thankfully, those days are long gone. Today, you need only travel to the community-based outpatient clinic (CBOC) nearest your home for quality care.

At your nearby CBOC, which is staffed by VA employees or a local medical practice contracted by VA, you can receive primary care services, such as a routine physical exam, screening tests, flu shots and other immunizations. A CBOC is also a good place to go if you're feeling a bit

under the weather. Follow-up care for certain chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, asthma and diabetes, and some post-hospital care are also available.

If a VA or contract primary care provider determines that you need specialty care, you will be referred to a VA medical center. And if you need medication, your VA or contract primary care provider will issue those medications.

In some cases, mental health needs may be diagnosed and treated by the primary care provider at the CBOC. The provider may refer the patient to mental health providers who are part of the CBOC staff or to a VA medical center, vet center or other agency. All CBOCs ensure that patients have access to mental health services.

Additional information about CBOCs is available from your nearest VA medical center (see back page for phone numbers). **VH**

For better service in the outpatient clinic, please ...

- call before coming in. We may be able to schedule an appointment for you on that same day.
- arrive on time for your appointment. This will allow time for your healthcare team to gather important information that will help you and your healthcare provider make the most of your visit.
- call the clinic to reschedule if you are unable to honor an appointment or are running late.

Reaching Us Is Easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

MEDICAL CENTERS

Brecksville VA Campus
10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
216-526-3030

Chillicothe VA Campus
17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Cincinnati VA Campus
3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Dayton VA Campus
4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Ft. Thomas VA Campus
1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
606-572-6202

Louis Stokes VA Campus
10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

INDEPENDENT OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Columbus VA Campus
543 Taylor Avenue
Columbus, OH 43203
614-257-5200

COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS

Akron VA Campus
676 South Broadway Street
Suite 203
Akron, OH 44311
330-344-4177

Athens VA Campus
510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Bellevue VA Campus
103 Landmark Drive
Bellevue, KY 41073
859-392-3840

Canton VA Campus
221 3rd Street SE
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4660

Clermont County VA Campus
Eastgate Professional
Office Park
4355 Ferguson Drive, Suite 270
Cincinnati, OH 45245
513-943-3680

Dearborn Co. VA Campus
710 W. Eads Parkway
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025
812-539-2313

East Liverpool VA Campus
332 West 6th Street
East Liverpool, OH 43920
330-386-4303

Grove City VA Campus
1953 Ohio Avenue
Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Lancaster VA Campus
1550 Sheridan Drive, Suite 100
Colonnade Medical Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Lima VA Campus
1220 E. Elm St., Suite 110
Lima, OH 45804
419-227-9676

Lorain VA Campus
205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield VA Campus
1456 Park Avenue West
Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

Marietta VA Campus
418 Colegate Drive
Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0412

McCafferty VA Campus
4242 Lorain Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44113
216-939-0699

Middletown VA Campus
675 North University Blvd.
Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

Painesville VA Campus
W 7 Jackson Street
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Portsmouth VA Campus
621 Broadway Street
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-353-3236

Richmond VA Campus
4351 South A Street
Richmond, IN 47374
765-973-6915

Sandusky VA Campus
3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Springfield VA Campus
512 South Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
937-328-3385

Warren VA Campus
Riverside Square
1400 Tod Avenue NW
Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

Youngstown VA Campus
2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Zanesville VA Campus
840 Bethesda Drive
Building 3A
Zanesville, OH 43701
740-453-7725

Call Tele-Nurse at 1-888-838-6446. • Visit us online at: www.va.gov/visn10/

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